

**ISSN**INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

ISSN No. : 2584-2757

Volume : 04

Issue : 01

DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.23492350



Publisher

**ROGANIDAN VIKRUTIVIGYAN PG ASSOCIATION
FOR PATHOLOGY AND RADIOIDGNOSIS**

Reg. No. : MAHA-703/16(NAG)

Year of Establishment – 2016

ISI Impact Factor (2025-26): 1.345

IIFS Impact Factor (2026-27): 6.0

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DIAGNOSTICS AND RESEARCH

An Introduction To Rajarshi Nagnajita Mentioned in Charaka Samhita and Evaluation of His Contribution To Ayurveda

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Article Info: Article Received on : 04/09/2026

Article Reviewed on: 10/09/2026

Article Published on : 15/10/2026

Cite this article as: - Waghe S. An Introduction To Rajarshi Nagnajita Mentioned in Charaka Samhita and Evaluation of His Contribution To Ayurveda. International Journal of Diagnostics And Research. 2026Oct20;4(1):135–45. doi:10.5281/zenodo.23492350

Abstract

Ayurveda has evolved through the collective wisdom of numerous *Rishis*, *Rajarshis*, physicians, scholars, and teachers who preserved and developed knowledge of health, disease, longevity, diet, therapeutics, and preventive medicine. Among the distinguished personalities associated with the ancient Ayurvedic tradition is **Rajarshi Nagnajita**, mentioned in classical Ayurvedic literature and specifically identified as *Vayorvida Nagnajita* in the *Charaka Samhita*. His inclusion among the eminent sages associated with the ancient deliberation on Ayurveda establishes his place in the broader intellectual tradition of Ayurveda. This literary study introduces Rajarshi Nagnajita, examines his lineage and geographical association, and critically evaluates his contribution to Ayurveda. Classical sources indicate that Nagnajita was associated with the Gandhara region and belonged to a royal lineage. The *Mahabharata* identifies Nagnajita as the king of Gandhara and states that his son was Subala, the father of Shakuni and Gandhari. The *Bhela Samhita* further provides an important account of an encounter between King Nagnajita of Gandhara and Acharya Punarvasu Atreya in the context of food poisoning. Particularly significant is the *Charaka Samhita*, where Nagnajita's opinions are cited regarding the pathogenesis of disease, the classification and properties of *Rasa*, the physiological functions of *Vata*, and the consequences of aggravated *Vata*. The *Kashyapa Samhita* also records Nagnajita's views concerning disease classification and describes a discourse concerning paediatric ophthalmic treatment. Further evidence from *Ashtanga Sangraha* associates Nagnajita with the description of the sequential manifestations of poisoning, including cardiovascular symptoms and death, while *Brihat Samhita* and *Matsya Purana* associate him with *Pratima-lakshana* and *Vastu-shastra*, respectively. Thus, Nagnajita appears to have been a multidisciplinary scholar-king whose interests extended beyond medicine. His Ayurvedic contribution is particularly noteworthy in *Vata-vijnana*, *Rasa-vijnana*, disease classification, toxicology, and preventive understanding of poisoned food. This review suggests that Nagnajita deserves greater recognition as an important contributor to the ancient Ayurvedic intellectual tradition. Rajarshi Nagnajita attended the conclave of rishis held beneath the mountains of the Himalayas some 7000 years ago. This not only shows his interest in medical science but also portrays him as a caring person for mankind's suffering. Hence, exploring the life of Sage Nagnajita is essential to understand his contribution to Ayurveda.

Keywords: Nagnajita, Rajarshi, Charaka Samhita, Vayorvida, Vata, Rasa, Agada Tantra, Gandhara.

Introduction :

Ayurveda's development is traditionally described as a continuous process of knowledge transmission from the divine to the sages and then from teachers to disciples. However, the classical texts demonstrate that Ayurveda was not developed by a single individual or confined to a single lineage.

Numerous *Rishis*, *Rajarshis*, physicians, philosophers, and scholars participated in its development.

The *Charaka Samhita* provides one of the most important descriptions of this ancient scholarly tradition. In the *Dirghanjivitiyam Adhyaya* of *Sutrasthana*, the text describes a large assembly of eminent sages in the Himalayan region. These sages focused on disease-related suffering and deliberated on the science of life and longevity. Among the personalities associated with this ancient tradition is **Nagnajita**.

Nagnajita is especially significant because his contribution in the *Charaka Samhita* goes beyond simple mention. At several places, his opinions are specifically cited under the designation **Vayorvida Nagnajita**, indicating that he was regarded as an authority on the nature and functions of *Vayu/Vata*. His views also occur in discussions concerning *Rasa* and disease development.

Other classical texts provide additional information. The *Bhela Samhita* identifies Nagnajita as the king of Gandhara and records his dialogue with Punarvasu Atreya concerning poisoned food. The *Kashyapa Samhita* records his views on disease classification and also includes a dialogue between King Nagnajita and Kashyapa on paediatric ophthalmic preparations. *Ashtanga Sangraha*

preserves an important description of the progression of poisoning attributed to Nagnajita.

These references make Nagnajita a particularly interesting figure for historical study because he appears simultaneously as a **king, scholar, medical thinker, authority on Vata and toxicology, and exponent of other branches of knowledge**.

This article therefore systematically examines the available classical references and evaluates Rajarshi Nagnajita's contribution to Ayurveda.

Aim :

To introduce Rajarshi Nagnajita, as mentioned in classical Ayurvedic literature, and evaluate his contribution to Ayurveda based on available textual evidence.

Objectives :

1. To study the identity and lineage of Rajarshi Nagnajita.
2. To examine his association with the Gandhara region.
3. To study the references to Nagnajita in the *Charaka Samhita*.
4. To evaluate his contribution to the understanding of *Vata*.
5. To examine his views regarding *Rasa*.
6. To study his observations concerning disease causation and classification.
7. To examine his contribution to toxicology and the understanding of poisoned food.
8. To study his association with paediatric ophthalmic therapeutics.
9. To explore references to Nagnajita in *Ashtanga Sangraha*, *Brihat Samhita*, and *Matsya Purana*.

10. To assess his overall contribution to the Ayurvedic intellectual tradition.

Material And Methods :

The present study is a **literary, conceptual, and historical review** based on classical Ayurvedic, epic, and Puranic literature.

The principal sources examined were:

- *Charaka Samhita*
- *Bhela Samhita*
- *Kashyapa Samhita*
- *Ashtanga Sangraha*
- *Mahabharata*
- *Matsya Purana*
- *Agni Purana*
- *Brihat Samhita*

We identified, translated, compared, and interpreted relevant references to Nagnajita in their textual context. Particular attention was given to passages that explicitly introduce Nagnajita's opinion using terms such as *Vayorvida Nagnajita* or *Nagnajita Rajarshi*.

The information was organized under the following headings:

1. Identity and lineage
2. Kingdom and geographical association
3. Relationship with the Ayurvedic tradition
4. Contributions to *Vata-vijnana*
5. Contribution to *Rasa-vijnana*
6. Disease pathogenesis
7. Toxicology
8. Paediatric ophthalmology
9. Disease classification
10. Architectural and iconographic knowledge

Interpretation was based primarily on textual evidence. Where historical identification or

geographical reconstruction remains uncertain, conclusions have been expressed cautiously.

Review Of Literature :

Residence and Kingdom of Nagnajita

Rishi Nagnajita was king of the Gandhar region, which corresponds to modern-day Afghanistan. In those days, it served as a gateway to Swarga (heaven), located around the Alborz (Elburz) Mountains in modern-day Iran.^[1]

Family Tree of King Nagnajita

King Yayati's son from Sharmishta was Drahyu. He became the king of Mlenchha. He had two sons, viz. 1. Setu and 2. Ketu (Babhrhu). Setu's son was Shardwan (Angarsetu/Arabdhya), and his son was Gandhar. This king, Gandhar, created the vast Gandhar kingdom (present-day Afghanistan and some parts of Pakistan and Iran). Gandhar's horses were called 'Aratta' and were among the best in the world. Gandhar's son was Dharma, and Dharma's son was Dhruta. King Dhruta's son was Vidusha/Durmana, and his son was Pracheta. King Pracheta had a hundred sons who became the kings of different Mlenchha states (like Ushinara, Madra, Kekaya, Bhadrak, etc) in the northern region of Gandhar.^{[2] [3]}

Of Pracheta's hundred sons, four were prominent: 1. Anadu, 2. Subhanu, 3. Chakshush, 4. Parmeshu. King Subhanu's son was Kalanala, and his son was Srunjaya. King Srunjaya's son was Purunjaya. King Purunjaya's son was Janamejaya. King Janamejaya's son was Mahashal, and his son was Mahamana.^[4]

After King Pracheta, a learned person in his lineage named Nagnajita became the king of Gandhara. He

was very famous for his valour.^[1] King Nagnajita's son was Subala. King Subala had a famous son, Shakuni (Saubala), and a daughter, Gandhari. They were experts in economics.^{[5][6][7]}

Shakuni's son was Uluka, whom Arjuna killed in an attempt to stop the horse of King Yudhishtira's Ashwamedha Yagya after the Mahabharata war.^[8]

King Nagnajita As Daruwaha

According to commentator Acharya Indu Kara, Nagnajita is also called Daruwaha, and they represent the same person.^[9]

Contribution to Ayurveda

Vayorvida Naganajita's Opinion on

Development of Diseases

Vayorvida is of the view that only mind is not responsible for the diseases in the body. Without the physical body there is no existence of either diseases or mind. Hence, all the living beings are made up of plasma. And plasma gives rise to many diseases. Water is the basis of plasma, and the same is responsible for the existence of living beings and the development of diseases.^[10]

Vayorvida Naganajita's Opinion on Types of

Rasas

Vayorvida holds that Rasa are of six types based on properties: 1. *Guru* (heavy), 2. *Laghu* (lightness), 3. *Sheeta* (coolness), 4. *Ushna* (warmness), 5. *Snigdha* (unctuousness), 6. *Ruksha* (dryness).^[11]

Vayorvida Naganajita's Opinion on Role of

Normal Vata In The Body

Vayorvid Naganajita holds that aggravated or normal Vata definitely moves in the body. Vayu nourishes the body and body organs. It is of five

types; viz. 1. Pran, 2. Udan, 3. Vyan, 4. Saman, 5. Apan. It governs bodily activities, including the higher centres. It regulates the mind. It controls sensory-motor functions, from receiving information to processing and executing it. Vata also governs the union of fractures. Vata is responsible for speech. Vata governs tactile sensory information. Vata is responsible for hearing. Vata governs tactile joy and enthusiasm. Vata governs the secretion of HCl. Vata governs the absorption of doshas. Vata governs the expulsion of nitrogenous waste, stool, and urine. Vata differentiates small and big systems. Vata is responsible for the shape of the foetus.^[12]

Vayorvida Naganajita's Opinion on Role of

Aggravated Vata In The Body

Vayorvida Naganajita is of the view that aggravated Vata in the body reduces power, complexion, happiness, and longevity. It puts the mind in depression. It causes sensory-motor alteration. It produces harmful effects on the foetus in utero in the form of either premature expulsion or delayed delivery. It causes anxiety, depression, confusion and delirium.^[13]

Kashyapa's Discourse To King Naganajita on

Paediatric Ophthalmic Preparations

In this chapter of the Kashyapa Samhita, sage Kashyapa tells King Nagnajita about the different medications for ophthalmic disorders of the paediatric population.^[14]

Types of Disease As per King Naganajita

As per King Naganajita, there are five types of diseases; viz. 1. *Vataj*, 2. *Pittaj*, 3. *Kaphaj*, 4. *Tridoshaj*, and 5. *Agantuj*. Of these, the first four

are endogenous causes, whereas the fifth is exogenous. This quote from King Nagnajita appears in the Kashyap Samhita, Khila Sthana.^[15]

Nagnajita's Conversation with Atreya

Punarvasu About Food Poisoning

On his way to Swarga (paradise in Iran), Acharya Punarvasu met King Nagnajita of Gandhara (Afghanistan). In this meeting, King Nagnajita told Acharya Punarvasu that he did not fear being attacked with weapons or by a female spy (honey trap), but he feared poison mixed into food as king. So he asked Acharya Punarvasu to explain the features of poisoned food and how to protect oneself from it.^[16]

Poison Waves: As per Acharya Nagnajita,

In the first attack of poison, blood gets vitiated. In the second wave, edema develops. In the third wave, the body tingles. In the fourth wave of poison, there is fever and syncope. In the fifth wave of poison, the body gets pale, and there is swelling of the tongue and face. In the sixth wave of poison, there is discomfort in the chest and heart. In the seventh wave of poison, there is death of an individual.^[17]

King Nagnajita: An Expert of Ancient Idol-

Making Science (Pratima-shastra)

King Nagnajita was also said to be an expert in the science of idol-making. In ancient India, a science existed that fixed the dimensions of God's idol. Such idols were then kept into the temples for worship. King Nagnajita was also said to be an expert in ancient Indian architectural science.^[18]

King Nagnajita: An Expert of Ancient Architecture (Vastu-shastra)

King Nagnajita was also said to be an expert in ancient Indian architectural science (Vastu-shastra), along with illustrious sages like Bhrigu, Atri, Vishwakarma, Maya, Narada, Shaunaka, and Garga.^[19]

Observations :

The following observations emerge from the present literary study:

1. Nagnajita is represented as a **Rajarshi and king of Gandhara**.
2. The *Mahabharata* identifies him as a famous and valorous king.
3. His son was Subala, who was the father of Shakuni and Gandhari according to the epic tradition.
4. The *Bhela Samhita* associates Nagnajita with the Gandhara region and records his dialogue with Punarvasu Atreya.
5. Nagnajita was concerned about poisoning through food and sought knowledge concerning its detection and prevention.
6. The *Charaka Samhita* identifies him as **Vayorvida Nagnajita**.
7. He contributed important observations regarding the physiological functions of Vata.
8. He described the pathological effects of aggravated Vata.
9. He expressed an integrated view concerning the relationship between mind, body, and disease.
10. He contributed a property-based classification of *Rasa*.

11. The *Kashyapa Samhita* records his classification of diseases into five categories.
12. The *Kashyapa Samhita* also associates him with paediatric ophthalmic therapeutics.
13. *Ashtanga Sangraha* preserves his views concerning the progressive manifestations of poisoning.
14. According to Indukara, Nagnajita was also known as Daruwaha.
15. *Brihat Samhita* associates Nagnajita with *Pratima-lakshana*.
16. *Matsya Purana* lists Nagnajita among authorities associated with *Vastu-shastra*.
17. Nagnajita therefore appears to represent a multidisciplinary scholar-king rather than a narrowly specialised physician.

Evaluation of His Contribution to Ayurveda

The contribution of Rajarshi Nagnajita can be summarised under the following domains:

Domain	Contribution attributed to Nagnajita
Vata-vijnana	Detailed description of physiological functions of Vata
Vata pathology	Description of systemic and psychological effects of aggravated Vata
Rasa-vijnana	Property-based classification of six Rasas
Disease causation	Integrated relationship between body and mind
Disease classification	Vataja, Pittaja, Kaphaja, Tridoshaja and Agantuja
Agada Tantra	Recognition of food poisoning and its progressive manifestations
Kaumarabhritya	Association with paediatric ophthalmic therapeutics
Preventive medicine	Concern regarding detection and prevention of poisoned food
Pratima-shastra	Association with iconographic proportions
Vastu-shastra	Listed among traditional authorities of architectural science

Discussion :

Rajarshi Nagnajita represents a distinctive personality in the history of Ayurveda because his contribution cannot be restricted to one branch of medical knowledge.

First, Nagnajita was a king who was also **recognised as a learned authority**. His royal status and scholarly identity are reflected by the designation *Rajarshi*.

The second and more important observation is that Nagnajita's name appears repeatedly in classical medical literature. The *Charaka Samhita* does not merely mention him in passing; it records his opinions on several fundamental Ayurvedic concepts.

His designation as **Vayorvida** is particularly significant. *Vata* is one of the three *Doshas* and is traditionally regarded as the principle responsible for movement and regulation of numerous physiological processes. Nagnajita's extensive description of Vata indicates an advanced conceptual understanding of physiological coordination.

His discussion of aggravated Vata is equally important. The consequences described involve the mind, sensory functions, reproductive processes, vitality, and systemic health. This demonstrates an integrated understanding of disease rather than a narrowly localized model.

Another important contribution concerns *Rasa*. Nagnajita's classification based on *Guru*, *Laghu*, *Shita*, *Ushna*, *Snigdha*, and *Ruksha* demonstrates an attempt to understand substances through functional properties. This property-based approach

became fundamental to Ayurvedic pharmacological reasoning.

His association with food poisoning is equally noteworthy. The dialogue with Punarvasu Atreya in the *Bhela Samhita* shows that a king was deeply concerned about deliberate food poisoning and sought systematic knowledge for its prevention. This provides a historical example of the application of medical knowledge to public and royal safety.

The seven-stage description of poisoning preserved in *Ashtanga Sangraha* is particularly valuable. It demonstrates recognition of progressive clinical manifestations following exposure to poison. The sequence involving blood disturbance, swelling, sensory symptoms, fever, altered consciousness, cardiac discomfort, and death reflects a clinically oriented observation of toxic manifestations.

Nagnajita's association with the *Kashyapa Samhita* further expands his contribution. His classification of diseases into Vataja, Pittaja, Kaphaja, Tridoshaja, and Agantuja demonstrates his understanding of disease taxonomy. The paediatric ophthalmic reference further connects him with the domain of *Kaumarabhritya*.

His traditional association with *Pratima-shastra* and *Vastu-shastra* indicates that the Nagnajita tradition extended beyond medicine. Whether all such references refer to exactly the same historical individual or to a lineage bearing the name Nagnajita remains an important question for future research.

From a historiographical perspective, this distinction is essential. Ancient texts often preserve names of teachers, lineages, or authorities across

different periods. Therefore, while the cumulative evidence establishes Nagnajita as a highly significant traditional authority, one should not assert precise chronological identification without additional evidence.

Nevertheless, his consistent association with medicine, toxicology, disease classification, and Vata physiology strongly supports the conclusion that Nagnajita occupies an important place in the history of Ayurvedic thought.

Limitations of the Present Study

The present study relies primarily on textual and traditional literary evidence. Several limitations should therefore be acknowledged.

First, the available references alone cannot establish Nagnajita's exact chronological position.

Second, the name Nagnajita may represent an individual as well as a scholarly lineage or traditional authority. Therefore, we cannot assume, without qualification, that every reference to Nagnajita in different texts refers to the same historical person.

Third, the geographical boundaries of ancient Gandhara changed over time. Consequently, equating Gandhara precisely with any one modern country's territory would be historically inappropriate.

Fourth, the traditional genealogies of the *Mahabharata* and Puranas should be interpreted as textual-historical traditions rather than treated automatically as modern historical records.

Fifth, although the *Charaka Samhita* explicitly attributes several opinions to Nagnajita, the available texts do not provide a complete independent treatise authored by him.

Despite these limitations, the repeated attribution of specific medical opinions to Nagnajita across multiple classical sources provide substantial evidence of his importance in the Ayurvedic intellectual tradition.

Future Scope

Further research on Rajarshi Nagnajita may include:

1. A critical compilation of every occurrence of the name Nagnajita in Ayurvedic literature.
2. Comparative study of Nagnajita's quotations in *Charaka Samhita*, *Bhela Samhita*, *Kashyapa Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Sangraha*.
3. Investigation of all commentarial interpretations of the designation *Vayorvida Nagnajita*.
4. Comparative analysis of Nagnajita's concept of Vata with descriptions provided by other ancient authorities.
5. Detailed study of the seven-stage poisoning model attributed to Nagnajita.
6. Investigation of the relationship between his toxicological observations and the later development of *Agada Tantra*.
7. Study of his classification of disease in relation to the broader evolution of Ayurvedic nosology.
8. Investigation of Nagnajita's contribution to *Kaumarabhritya*.
9. Critical examination of the identification of Nagnajita with Daruwaha.
10. Comparative textual study of references to Nagnajita in *Mahabharata*, *Matsya Purana*, *Brihat Samhita*, and Ayurvedic texts.

whether references to Nagnajita represent one

historical personality or a succession of teachers belonging to a Nagnajita tradition.

Conclusions :

Rajarshi Nagnajita occupies a significant position in the intellectual history of Ayurveda. Classical literature presents him as a learned king of Gandhara and an authority whose interests spanned medicine, toxicology, disease classification, Vata physiology, pharmacological properties, paediatric ophthalmology, architecture, and iconography.

His most important Ayurvedic contribution is preserved in the *Charaka Samhita*, where he is identified as Vayorvida Nagnajita, and his opinions on the role of Vata in normal physiology and disease are quoted. His observations show an understanding of Vata as a comprehensive regulatory principle governing movement, sensory and motor functions, mental activity, speech, digestion, elimination, reproduction, development, and systemic coordination.

His property-based understanding of *Rasa* further demonstrates the analytical nature of his medical thought. His observations regarding aggravated Vata reveal an integrated view of physical, psychological, sensory, and reproductive disturbances.

The account in the *Bhela Samhita* adds another important dimension by presenting Nagnajita as a king concerned with the dangers of poisoned food. His association with the progressive stages of poisoning in *Ashtanga Sangraha* further establishes his significance in the history of toxicology. The *Kashyapa Samhita* expands his medical association

to disease classification and paediatric ophthalmology.

Thus, Nagnajita should not be regarded merely as one of the many names occurring in ancient Ayurvedic literature. The textual evidence portrays him as a **Rajarshi, medical thinker, Vata expert, contributor to toxicology, and knowledgeable patron of diverse sciences.**

At the same time, chronological and historical identification should remain cautious because the available evidence does not permit us to establish with certainty that all references to Nagnajita across the various textual traditions refer to one and the same historical individual.

Nevertheless, the repeated and specific attribution of medical opinions to Nagnajita provides sufficient grounds to recognise him as an important **Charaka Samhitokta Ayurvedic authority** whose contribution deserves further systematic study.

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Declaration :

Conflict of Interest : None

ISSN: 2584-2757

DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.23492350

Dr. Subhash Waghe Inter. J.Digno. and Research

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